
Government of the District of Columbia



Executive Office of the Mayor

Testimony of
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City Administrator and Deputy Mayor

**PUBLIC OVERSIGHT HEARING ON
THE SURSUM CORDA/NORTHWEST ONE
REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT**

Committee on Economic Development
The Honorable Sharon Ambrose, Chair
Council of the District of Columbia

November 16, 2005

Council Chamber, Room 500
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004
10:00am

Good morning Chairperson Ambrose, members of the Committee on Economic Development, and other Council members. My name is Robert C. Bobb Deputy Mayor and City Administrator for the District of Columbia. I am here on behalf of Mayor Anthony A. Williams to seek approval from the Committee and the Council for Mayor Williams' New Communities Initiative. I am also here to discuss the proposed Northwest One Redevelopment Plan, which is the plan for the District's *first* New Community.

In District of Columbia, we are in the midst of an affordable housing crisis. The Williams Administration is committed to protecting affordable housing and giving residents in the path of gentrification, the tools to survive and prosper in their neighborhood.

At its core, Northwest One Revitalization Plan intends to make the Northwest One a community of choice for all income levels through a tri-fold process that includes:

- I. Physical Plan,
- II. Human Capital Plan, and
- III. Development and Finance Strategy.

The Northwest One Redevelopment Plan examines, evaluates and makes recommendations for affordable and mixed-income housing, public facilities, urban design, parks, open space and transportation. And most importantly, the Redevelopment Plan addresses the severe and urgent human needs in the community. In my remarks, I will provide a brief background on our joint plans for revitalizing Northwest One, and I will speak to the soul of this endeavor – the need to unite the rebuilding of homes with the rebuilding of human capital in this community.

For the sake of brevity, throughout my testimony, I will refer to the area involving Northwest One, which includes the footprint of the Sursum Corda Cooperative, as simply Northwest One. The area includes a mix of retirees, small and large families, single parent homes and disabled people—mostly black and mostly poor—all sharing many of the same values, affordable housing concerns, and quality of life priorities as you and me and most other District residents.

BACKGROUND ON NORTHWEST ONE

While many District neighborhoods are enjoying resurgence in the last few years, many families living in Washington, DC are still living in neighborhoods tormented by concentrations of violent crime and grinding poverty. Neighborhoods like Northwest One face many challenges, including increased crime, poor education attainment, high unemployment, lack of housing opportunities, and inability to support businesses and institutions needed to sustain the people in the community.

Our involvement with Northwest One started in early 2004, when the community was still reeling from the 2004 murder of Princess Hansen, one of the District's most heinous murders in recent history. With the 15-year-old's assassination, we began the Hot Spots Initiative, a concentrated focus of local and federal resources aligned to decrease crime and improve the quality of life for the people living in this neighborhood. Indeed, as the Hot Spots Initiative successfully lowered crime plaguing the community, the development interest in the neighborhood began to increase. Ultimately, with the potential easing of affordable housing restrictions and growth around the community in the two rapidly changing neighborhoods of Mt. Vernon Triangle and the area north of Massachusetts Avenue, Northwest One squarely entered into developers' sites.

Compounding the residents' precarious situation was the threat of foreclosure in three deeply subsidized housing developments in the neighborhood—Sursum Corda Cooperative, Temple Courts Apartments, and the Golden Rule Center. The physical distress of these developments made the loss of subsidized housing through foreclosure from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development a potential reality.

As crime started to abate to a certain degree, we realized we needed to expand our focus to the root causes of human suffering in the Northwest One area: distressed housing, low educational attainment, physical and mental health conditions, underemployment, and concentrated poverty.

In order to address these root causes of suffering, Mayor Williams directed our team to engage in a community-based planning process to start planning for a vibrant, new mixed-income community where all residents have the tools necessary to thrive and contribute.

In response, I assembled a high-level, cross-agency team that I am leading personally, along with the other Deputy Mayors, to address four problems facing the Northwest One community:

1. High concentration of violent crime,
2. Poverty,
3. Distressed housing and
4. Strong development pressures in the neighborhood.

In fact, for the last year our team has worked, on a weekly basis, with residents in the neighborhood. Our efforts culminated in intensive, four-day community planning workshops, commonly referred to as a “charette.” Kicked off by Mayor Williams and I on June 21st, the charette lasted from July 6th to July 9th and provided residents the opportunity to work directly with the planners, architects, development advisors and District officials to create a vision and refine our partnership.

Our partnership is anchored on principles that were ratified on January 31st, when residents and I, signing of behalf of the Executive Offices of the Mayor, executed a document called the “Guiding Principles.”

We worked for months negotiating the Guiding Principles. Through the Guiding Principles, the government and residents committed that while we will not always agree, we will remain at the same table and we will work together to find solutions that work for everyone. We held fast to the Principles and now, the Executive and the Northwest One Council can jointly present this proposed Redevelopment Plan.

In addition to the principle of partnership, the Guiding Principles speak to several crucial development principles. The fundamental principle is **one-for-one replacement** of each and every low-income subsidized housing unit in the area.

Another key development principle is **Build First** – which speaks to the need to build new mixed-income housing for existing and new residents before existing housing is demolished. Our plan calls for the construction of **mixed-income housing** on land controlled by the National Capital Revitalization Corporation and the District Government, as soon as possible, to enable a careful phasing of the redevelopment.

Finally, enshrined in the Guiding Principles is the concept of “**Right-to-Stay**.” Right-to-Stay means that each resident that has a home today in Northwest One is guaranteed the right to stay and prosper in the new community – provided that the resident avails himself or herself of the human capital programming.

Our Redevelopment Plan replaces each low-income unit and provides for approximately 591 new workforce housing units as well as approximately 597 market-rate units. Each unit will have the highest quality urban design features and amenities.

When you walk through the halls of a new building, you will not know when you knock on your neighbor’s door what your neighbor’s income may be.

In order to create a neighborhood of choice, all homeowners and renters must have a sense that their neighbors will share certain values and behaviors. The combination of tough, yet predictable and fair Right-To-Stay criteria and a customized human capital plan for each family will give residents the tools they need to take advantage of the Right-to-Stay principle.

Learning about financial literacy, focusing on physical and mental health, becoming more engaged in community activities, and repairing challenged credit histories is a tough but necessary road. And it is these steps that are required of families in order to lift themselves up with the tools provided in the Human Capital Plan.

ADDRESSING HUMAN CAPITAL NEEDS

The vision of the human capital plan involves place-based case management services for each household. Each family will be able to see the same case management team each week in their neighborhood – as opposed to needing to navigate the sometimes opaque-seeming bureaucracy.

The large number of community organizations is one of Northwest One's most valuable assets. As such, we identified the broad vision of the Northwest One Redevelopment Strategy by consulting many stakeholders, including District agencies, local community organizations, non-profits, local foundations, churches, resident associations, schools, the Northwest One Council, and neighborhood residents.

At the conclusion of the process, all parties agreed that it is the human capital considerations, not the physical plan with its bricks and mortar, which under gird any New Community and similarly, it is the Human Capital Plan that is the foundation of our plans for Northwest One.

CONCLUSION

I have shared the highlights and background on our plans to redevelop the Northwest One community, which is based on the New Communities initiative that rebuilds human architecture as we rebuild the physical infrastructure of this community. To recap, there are three components in the Northwest One Redevelopment Plan: 1.) Human Capital Plan, 2.) Physical Plan, and 3.) Development and Finance Strategy.

Following my remarks, Brenda Donald Walker, Deputy Mayor for Children, Youth, Families and Elders will go deeper into the human capital framework; next, Ellen McCarthy will outline the proposed Master Plan for Northwest One; and finally, Stan Jackson, Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development will describe the development and finance strategy for the Northwest One Redevelopment Plan.

Finally, I stress that a mixed-income community resulting from the Northwest One Redevelopment not only ensures the long-term viability of this neighborhood, it embodies the notion that the residents of Northwest One, like most Americans, share similar values, quality of life expectations, and hopes for the nation's capital to remain America's hometown. It is in this context, that we can make it happen in our city.